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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY Poland

SUBJECT Conditions in the Lodz Area; Availability of Food, Textile
Medical Supplies/Postal Regulations/New Identity Cards

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1. "The comments below, dating through February 1953, pertain to consumer supply and general living conditions in the Lodz area of Poland following the abolition of food rationing and the most recent adjustments in price and wage scales.

Food

2. "The food shops in Poland, particularly those in larger towns, are now well stocked with all kinds of supplies. However, the new prices, the so-called 'commercial prices' (Komercyjne), are many times higher than were the prices of rationed foods. For example:

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Former rationed price</u>	<u>Present 'commercial' price</u>
1 kg of sugar	5.25 Zlotys	15.-Zl.
1 kg of butter	24.-	52-60.-
2 kg prime veal	8-9.-	30.-
1 kg prime beef	6-7.-	26.-
1 kg semi-dry sausage	18-24.-	55.-

3. "I believe the present surprising abundance of foodstuffs in the shops will prove merely temporary since it is the result of an artificial accumulation of food supplies in the hands of the State through the past arbitrary ration system. Although the present food prices are rather prohibitive, people are so undernourished after years of privation that many are stocking up on supplies notwithstanding the family budget. The inevitable result of the present increased demand will be a further increase in food prices in an attempt to balance the market and maintain the regular flow of essential supplies.

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Textiles

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4. "The price differences for textiles are less striking. The increase over former prices is 10-20% on the average. What makes these price increases actually larger than they appear is that the quality of all textiles has deteriorated considerably. Pure woollens are no longer obtainable in the State shops. The best quality goods contain a maximum of 60% wool. The average quality goods contain only 30% wool.
5. "An increasing shortage of textiles can be observed throughout Poland. More large textile consignments are being directed to the tailors' cooperatives and thus diverted from direct distribution to consumers. In this way people are being prevented from buying materials personally to supply their own private tailors and dressmakers. Instead they are compelled to patronize the tailors' cooperatives, which have always been unpopular because of their low standard of workmanship and slow service.

Black Market

6. "Under present conditions the black market in food shows a downward trend. Black market activities have generally diminished.
7. "Black market trade in gold and foreign currencies is practically at a standstill. People fear a further increase in prices and a further depreciation of the Zloty and are therefore reluctant to dispose of what valuable foreign currencies they still possess. One dollar on the black market costs [late Feb 1953] around 70 Zl.; a \$20-gold coin sells for 6,500 Zl. The 'supply' is very limited.
8. "The State shops dealing in gold and jewelry have few customers. The standard (official) price offered by these shops is about 200 Zl for one gr of 14-carat gold.
9. "The new policy of the State Tribunals is to punish black-marketeering very severely. Even in 1952 gold and currency cases were dealt with rather leniently. Often the authorities were satisfied with the confiscation of the currencies; the dealers were not persecuted. Now the situation has changed: black-marketeers may receive as much as 10 years' imprisonment for illegal currency and gold transactions. It was rumored in Jewish circles in Poland that in October 1952 two Jews from Lodz (one by the name of [fun] Kaplan) were sentenced to death for black market transactions in dollars and were executed.

Medical Supplies

10. "A certain improvement could be observed in early 1953 in drug supplies. Unfortunately, it is merely an improvement in quantity accompanied by a deterioration in quality. The drugs available on the market are either of Polish production or imported from other Cominform countries; there is nothing of Western origin. Polish physicians distrust these Eastern brands. In serious cases, they usually advise their patients to try to obtain Western medicines on the black market.
11. "Supplies of domestic penicillin are adequate; some pharmacies sell it even without prescription. Patients are usually reluctant to use this domestic penicillin because it causes strong pains in the muscles and joints near the point of injection. The Polish penicillin is manufactured in crystals. Oil-penicillin imported from Hungary, is also available. It has a still worse reputation than the Polish variety. Very rarely some Danish penicillin 'Leo' brand-is available.

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12. "The shortage of cotton wool and medical dressings is getting more and more acute. According to rumors most cotton wool factories and related industries are working exclusively for the Polish and Soviet armies.
13. "Trade in foreign medical supplies smuggled in from abroad is still quite brisk. Considerable supplies of this kind reach Poland in parcels from the West. I often saw hand-written advertisements stuck on fences and walls, offering at a given address 'the best Western medicines against TB'.

Postal Regulations

14. "All letters to foreign addresses must now be personally handed over at the Post Office - not just registered letters, as previously. The envelopes must be left open and must bear the name and address of the sender. Since, however, the person submitting a letter is not required to identify himself with documents, many use fictitious names and addresses when writing abroad.

Identity Cards

15. "The issue of new identity cards had not resulted, as of late February 1953, in the political classification of the population that was anticipated. Contrary to advance fears the new documents seem to be identical with the old. However, the authorities seem most anxious not to let any of these new cards be carried across the Polish frontiers. A Jewish woman from Lodz [redacted] said that she had been at the frontier two weeks previously but had been turned back from Zebrzydowice to Lodz, because she did not have a receipt proving that she had surrendered her new identity card to the police upon receiving her foreign passport. All identity cards must be surrendered to the WOP authorities (Frontier Guard Police) upon leaving Poland.

Crime

16. "There has been a sharp increase of crime in Poland. This is due partly to the great impoverishment of the population but mainly to the recent amnesty under which many common criminals were released. The number of thefts, burglaries and armed robberies is on the increase and, what is worse, the efficiency of the Militia in fighting crime leaves much to be desired. It is evidently far more important to the authorities to track down the political opposition than to curb the activities of criminals.

Travel

17. "Travel, whether by train or by local means of transport including cabs, has not been restricted too much. A railway ticket (plus, of course, the identity card which everybody must carry at all times) is still the only document which a train passenger is obliged to carry during his travel. [redacted] There are rumors, however, that official travel orders will soon be required for the purchase of train tickets.
18. "Police control on trains and other means of transport is mainly concentrated on the passengers' luggage, not on the passengers themselves. Taxicabs are frequently stopped in the streets by the Traffic Militia under all sorts of pretexts, eg to check the driver's license. The real purpose is to check the luggage which the cab passenger has with him."

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